

REMARKS

Claims 8-10 are pending. By this Amendment, non-elected, withdrawn claims 1-7 are cancelled without prejudice to or disclaimer of the subject matter contained therein.

Applicants reserve the right to file one or more divisional applications to pursue the subject matter of the non-elected claims. In addition, the Abstract is amended, as requested in the Office Action, in order to reduce its length. The Abstract also is amended to more closely track the elected claims. Thus, no new matter is added by the above amendments.

Withdrawal of the objection to the Abstract, in view of the amendments described above, is requested.

Applicants note with appreciation the identification of allowable subject matter in claim 10. For at least the reasons set forth below, Applicants respectfully submit that all pending claims are in condition for allowance.

Claim 8 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) over U.S. Patent No. 6,751,947 to Lewis et al. In addition, claim 9 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Lewis et al. These rejections are respectfully traversed.

Lewis et al. does not disclose or suggest all of the steps recited in independent claim 8. Independent claim 8 recites, *inter alia*, that after a first catalyst and a second catalyst completely release oxygen stored in those catalysts, due to the supply of a rich air-fuel ratio: (1) the upstream-of-first catalyst air-fuel ratio is controlled to a first lean air-fuel ratio, until a time point when an output of a downstream-of-first catalyst air-fuel ratio sensor (which is positioned between the first and second catalysts) indicates a lean air-fuel ratio; and (2) then the upstream-of-first catalyst air-fuel ratio is controlled to a second lean air-fuel ratio that also is lean, and has a value that is determined in accordance with an oxidizing-reducing capability index value, until a time point when an output of the downstream-of-second catalyst air-fuel ratio sensor indicates a lean air-fuel ratio.

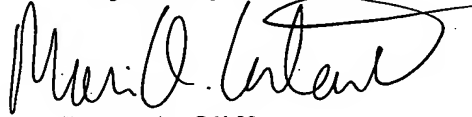
The portions of Lewis et al. cited in the Office Action do not disclose or suggest this combination of features. Lewis et al. teaches supplying a rich air-fuel ratio until multiple catalysts completely release oxygen, and then merely supplying a lean air-fuel ratio until the output of a most-downstream air-fuel ratio detector indicates lean. See, for example, col. 6, lines 2-8 and col. 6, lines 15-19. Lewis et al. does not disclose or suggest the claimed first and second lean air-fuel ratios recited in independent claim 8. In particular, Lewis et al. does not disclose or suggest that the air-fuel ratio is changed to the second lean air-fuel ratio, which is based on the oxidizing-reducing capability index value, when an output of the downstream-of-catalyst air-fuel ratio sensor of the first catalyst indicates that the air-fuel ratio is lean. Accordingly, Lewis et al. does not disclose or suggest the method of independent claim 8.

In addition, with respect to claim 9, using a first lean air-fuel ratio that is leaner than the second lean air-fuel ratio reduces the time required to determine the maximum storage amount of oxygen. See, for example, paragraph [0017] of the specification. Accordingly, and as such an advantage is not even recognized by Lewis et al., the features of claim 9 are not merely “an obvious matter of design choice” as alleged in the Office Action.

In view of the foregoing, Applicants respectfully submit that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and prompt allowance are earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner believe that anything further would be desirable in order to place this application in even better condition for allowance, the Examiner is invited to contact Applicants' undersigned attorney at the telephone number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,



James A. Oliff

Registration No. 27,075

Mario A. Costantino

Registration No. 33,565

JAO:MAC/ccs

Attachment:

Amended Abstract

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OLIFF & BERRIDGE, PLC
P.O. Box 19928
Alexandria, Virginia 22320
Telephone: (703) 836-6400

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